

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

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Indiana Pacers

Rick Carlisle

Media Day



Q. You have been in the 2011 Finals as an underdog. You guys won. How do you think that experience can help you through this Finals? How do you pass that to your players?

RICK CARLISLE: Yes, Oklahoma City's a great team. We're aware what's expected here. So, we've got a lot of work cut out for us. A lot of our guys have been through a lot of situations where they've been underdogs in the past.

It's simply going to come down to us being able to play our game at the best possible level. We're going to need to take care of the ball because these guys turn people over at an historic rate, and we're going to have to make some shots.

Q. There's been some discussion this week about this being a small market Finals. The Thunder were just up there, said some really cool stuff about what it's like to play here. You've had this long career and lived and worked in massive markets and small markets. What do you find is the charm of coaching and working in Indianapolis?

RICK CARLISLE: A lot of people talk about great places to live. When you have a good situation, you're working with great people, and your team is good, that's a great place to live.

Small market, big market, it doesn't matter. I have such great respect for what Oklahoma is building here. I know Mark Daigneault pretty well. Sam Presti and I go way back. I was invited to San Antonio's training camp in the fall of 2000 when I was heading into a year where I was going to take a year away. Ended up doing broadcasting stuff.

Sam Presti was an intern for the Spurs at that time. He is from the Boston area. So, he had grown up a Celtics fan. He actually remembered when I played, which was miraculous to me. Seemed like he was probably way too young for that.

We had a couple of dinners together. He asked me, what can I do? I got to somehow get a job out of this.

I said, just become a guy they can't live without.

Sam is a great demonstration of resourcefulness and wherewithal and stuff like that. He's forged himself a great career. He and Kevin Pritchard are two of the best franchise builders around.

This series should celebrate those two guys, their staffs, what they've done.

As far as the markets, I understand that there would be concern for how many people would watch because they're smaller markets. But if we're celebrating the game and we're putting game above all, which is one of the things that Adam Silver said when he became commissioner, then it really shouldn't matter. It really shouldn't matter.

So I know that we're going to do our very best to represent our city, our state at the best possible level. Thunder will do the same. This really hopefully is about the quality of the games. We got our work cut out for us there.

Q. If I may ask you to put your NBCA hat on, what was your reaction yesterday when he heard about Tom Thibodeau?

RICK CARLISLE: I mean, I get asked frequently about these things. I always say shocked. Sometimes you get numb and you're not shocked.

The Knicks have such a unique situation with so much attention and such a large fan base and such a worldwide following, it's one of the most difficult jobs to take. The guys that have been most successful, Red Holzman, Pat Riley, Jeff Van Gundy, Rick Pitino had a short run but a very effective run.

There were a lot of lean years. Thibs went in there and changed so much. So you look at all that, then what happened yesterday...

When I first saw it, I thought it was one of those fake AI

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things. No way. There's no way possible. I know how the players feel about him, too. So there's not much else to say. I mean, teams and ownership can make these decisions unilaterally, and it's their right to do that.

So, Tom will certainly be fine. I don't think he's going to have any problem finding his next job. It's just going to depend on when he's ready to jump back in again.

I have great respect for Thibs. I go back with him a very long way. I was surprised.

Q. You gave the anecdote yesterday of driving from Lisbon to Ogdensburg. Where you're from guys don't go to the NBA. It doesn't produce NBA players.

RICK CARLISLE: Jimmy Howard had a great career as a goalie in the National Hockey League. He's from Ogdensburg.

Q. But not the NBA.

RICK CARLISLE: No.

Q. Were you ever dissuaded? This is the path I want to go down, play at Maine, Virginia, play big-time basketball. Did you ever think, I can't because nobody here has done it? How did you get past all that?

RICK CARLISLE: One of my best friends growing up was a guy named Hal Cohen who played at Syracuse University. He was the greatest player to ever come out of the North Country. He was two years ahead of me in high school. He got a scholarship to Syracuse University.

He got a scholarship to a big-time basketball program. I grew up playing with him all the time, competing. It was one of the reasons that I ended up having a chance to get a Division I scholarship. I had to go to prep school to do it. I went to Worcester Academy for a year. University of Maine was my only Division I offer. Went there for two years. Through a series of connections and relationships was able to transfer to University of Virginia and play with Ralph Sampson for a year. That changed my life forever.

Had great coaching and a lot of things that were very fortunate. Ended up getting drafted by Boston in a round that no longer exists in the draft. A lot of things fell my way. But I worked hard, too.

You know, seeing Hal Cohen do that was something that gave a lot of people, a lot of guys in the North Country, a lot more belief about being able to go to higher levels, not just in basketball, but other sports. I think Jimmy Howard would be another example of that.

Q. There's so much discussion about who's the next face of the league. What do you think about to what degree that is imperative for the health of the league? Do there have to be a couple of guys that the whole ecosystem revolves around?

RICK CARLISLE: Having been drafted in 1984 in the midst of the Bird-Magic explosion of the NBA, I think people would assume that. It was Larry and Magic, then it was Michael Jordan for a few years.

Things are changing. The roster construction seems to be evolving in a slightly different direction, if not a pretty significantly different direction.

There are always going to be stars. Identifying with teams may become more of a significant thing than just the star aspect of it.

We'll have to see. It's such a dynamic business and it's so quickly changing. It can change in a moment, much like a playoff series can.

I just think the league is so healthy right now because there are so many young, great young players that have personality, that are such great promoters of the game simply by virtue of how they play the game, with their joy, with their love. It's moving away from an isolation league to really more of a team-type game.

Oklahoma plays that way. We try to play that way. So time will tell. But LeBron James and Steph Curry, I mean, those guys are still the gold standard really. I mean, they're still it. Those guys have been absolutely beyond belief.

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